

However, while research on the one part is busy finding where the vision was seen, research on the other has been busy destroying the man who saw it. We are told he was five different people; or four essentially, the fifth being insignificant.

This is not the place, nor am I the person, to deal in detail with this large and prickly proposition of Professor Manly's. I can only say that these 'schismatics' who 'the plain believers quit' may be right, but that they have done very little to prove it. The futile dust of bickering which obscured for a century and a half the fame of Homer has apparently failed to teach English experts at this process of splitting authors the essential lesson that their very-premisses are arbitrary. They never consider how much evidence is really needed to disprove unity of authorship in general. They assume, for the purposes of their game (which would indeed otherwise often become impossible to play) that the creative mind works with all the noble precision of their own—that authors cannot be inconsistent, or contradict themselves, or misunderstand their own work in revision, or catch temporary tricks of style, vocabulary, metre, only to lose them again a little further on, and in fact be generally will-o'-the-wisp. Add to this that the learned are almost as good at inventing inconsistencies as at discovering them. No doubt the later versions of *Piers Plowman* with their chaotic

labyrinths of digression and irrelevance do seem the work of a mind as incapable of clear, connected thinking as a kitten with a cotton-reel of sewing a sampler. But it has yet to be shown that this mind was not William Langland's.⁷ He

⁷ An astonishing instance of the general vagueness of the mediaeval mind may be seen in 1371 when Parliament voted a tax on the assumption that there were 40,000 parishes in England; and had hastily to reassemble a quorum and vote a new measure on